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J A N U A R Y · 1 9 5 5

HOMILETICS

Studies on the Swedish Gospels

SEPTUAGESIMA

LUKE 17:7-10

The Text and Its Central Thought.—This text does not teach how God feels towards us, but what our attitude towards Him should be in view of what He has done for us. The servant did not expect to sit down and eat upon returning from the field. He expected to serve his master willingly until all the master's desires had been satisfied. When he had faithfully finished all tasks, he expected no thanks, for he had only done his duty. The servant belonged to his master. It was his duty to serve, no matter how difficult the task or how long the hours. There was no overtime pay, not even a "thank you." When he had been faithful, he had only performed his duty, and he expected no praises or credit.—In a higher sense we belong to God, by creation (Ps. 100:3), by redemption (1 Cor. 6:19, 20), by sanctification (1 Cor. 12:3). We are to serve Him (2 Cor. 5:15). This is our duty because we belong to Him (Ps. 100:2-5). "For all which it is my duty to thank and praise, to serve and obey Him." "That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him."

The servant was faithful, though the day was long and the tasks were heavy. Though he was tired and hungry when he came home, he was still expected to serve. Though the demands of God's Law are exacting (Matt. 22:37-39), though the day of life be long, we are to serve faithfully. We are more than servants (John 15:15), we have been bought with something more precious than money (1 Peter 1:18, 19), we serve not an earthly master, but the Ruler of heaven and earth. We ought to serve willingly, joyfully, until the night of death relieves us of this responsibility and God's will concerning us has been fulfilled. Nor will we expect thanks from our Lord for our faithful service. Even if we could serve Him perfectly (of course we cannot), we would still have to admit that we deserve no thanks, for we have only done our duty.

NOTE: When Jesus says, "When ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you," He is speaking from the human viewpoint. In God's sight we cannot do all that is commanded (James 2:10). "Unprofitable servants" does not mean the kind of servants

God would rather not have, but servants who deserve no special credit because they have done only what God expects of them. The Gospel background for this text is supplied elsewhere in Scripture.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Gospel, Matt. 20:1-16, stresses that salvation is by God's grace, not man's merit. The Epistle, 1 Cor. 9:24 to 10:5, warns against falling from grace. The Introit is the cry of the sinner troubled by his guilt, the Collect is a plea to be remembered in mercy, and the Gradual expresses confidence in the Lord's merciful deliverance. All center around this thought: Salvation is by grace alone. The text encourages us to serve God in the right spirit to show our appreciation for His free salvation. This is necessary for making "New Conquests for Christ in the Homeland," *Parish Activities*.

Purpose of the Text.—To encourage us Christians, who have been saved by grace, to show our appreciation for the wonderful gift of salvation by serving the Lord in the proper spirit.

Illustrations.—Examples of serving God in the right spirit: Joseph (Gen. 39:9); Peter and John (Acts 7:41, 42); Paul (1 Tim. 1:11, 12, Eph. 3:7, 8); Livingstone: "We ought not talk of sacrifice when we remember the great sacrifice which He made who left His Father's throne to give Himself for us."

Outline

When do we serve God in the right spirit?

I. When we recognize that He is our Lord.

A. We belong to the Lord.

1. By right of creation.
2. By right of redemption.
3. By right of sanctification.

B. That makes it our duty to serve.

1. Servant in text served because he belonged to his master.
2. We serve our Lord because we belong to Him.
3. Thereby we thank Him for making us His own by His love.

II. When we look upon our service of Him as a privilege.

A. We must expect no special thanks for serving God.

1. The servant expected no thanks, though he served faithfully and long.
2. We expect no thanks, for even if we could do His will perfectly, we should only be performing our duty.

- B. Serving God is a privilege.
1. The slave knew his master would provide bodily needs.
 2. But our Lord provides more — bodily and spiritual needs.
- C. Looking upon service of God as a privilege inspires willingness and faithfulness to the end.
1. The servant worked until all his master's wants were satisfied because it was his duty.
 2. We have a mightier incentive: God has saved us from perishing in sin, that we might glorify Him both now and forever.

Conclusion: Let us not become weary in serving God. Remember: We belong to Him with whom "duty is beauty."

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SEXAGESIMA

JOHN 12:35-38

The Text and Its Central Thought. — The text records some of the last words spoken by Jesus to the multitudes. When they saw Him again, He was on trial before Pilate. He had just spoken of His death (v. 32), which they rightly understood to be crucifixion, but which they could not reconcile with the thought of His Messiahship. They were almost ready at this time to accept Him as the Christ of prophecy. They had welcomed Him as their King. But they wanted no part of a dying Christ.

The reason for this was their lack of spiritual insight. They needed enlightenment. Here was Christ, the Light of the world, ready to enlighten them with His Holy Spirit, ready to lead them into all truth, yet they believed not on Him.

Even at this late date, when He had practically finished His public ministry, had worked His last public miracles (those in the garden were witnessed by comparatively few and His resurrection by none), the multitudes still were not ready to accept Him.

They must do so soon, or darkness would descend upon them. Christ would withdraw His presence from them. His physical presence (v. 36) was not meant, for the light is not dependent on that. He would withdraw His gracious presence from them.

This took place when the Apostles left Jerusalem for the last time. To this day the Jews are walking in gross darkness and know not whither they are going.

But those who believe in the light are the sons of light, enjoying all the blessings of sonship. (Compare: sons of the kingdom . . . of the Father . . . of God; again, sons of evil . . . of thunder . . . of perdition.)

In the light of Christ's Word all things become plain: the Passion of Christ, God's love, His mercy, His truth, His redemption, even His judgment; all are understood by those who have the light. The darkness will seek to crowd in upon Christians (cp. the Epistle for the Day), but the light drives it back. Our doubts are removed, our cares are made light, our problems are solved, our whole life with its trials makes sense in the light of God's Word.

The Day and Its Theme.—The Word of God (Gospel for the Day) is amply covered in this text, as is also the theme of *Parish Activities*, "New Conquests for Christ in the Homeland." The light of God's grace is shining brightly in America at this writing. The opportunities beckoning to our church are great, and great must be our regret if we neglect them. In the Lenten weeks to come our message for fallen man will be especially pertinent. Let the sons of light arise and bring the message of salvation to a world dark in sin and death. For the light will not be here forever. Thank God it is here now.

Sin and Its Fruit.—Unbelief, the greatest of all sins, is laid bare. Until it is removed, there is no salvation. Even Christians are tempted not to believe all that the Scriptures have to say of Christ (Luke 18:34). Only with the light of the Word can unbelief be driven back.

Opportunities for Explicit Gospel.—For those who walk in the light the Gospel of this text is clear. Viewed in its context, the text presents a challenge to every pastor to make the most of each service of worship.

Illustrations.—Don't present Christ's light as a searchlight uncovering sin. The Law does that—and there is Law in this text. Christ's light is the light of grace.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—To prepare the hearer for a fuller, richer experience of all that the Lenten season has to offer in blessings and opportunities to serve.

Outline

Help men (by the light of the Gospel) to see God as He wants to be seen.

- I. Not as a God of wrath, leaving men to their fate.
 - A. He shows this wrath only to warn men of what lies ahead (vv. 35b, 36b).
 - B. Not to drive them from Him.

II. But as a God of love.

- A. Loving them to the end (text in context).
- B. Seeking always to reveal Himself as such.
 1. In the Old Testament (v. 38).
 2. In the New Testament (vv. 35, 36).
 3. In the witness of Christians today.

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MARK J. STEEGE

QUINQUAGESIMA

MARK 10:32-45

The Text and Its Central Thought.—Parallel accounts of this text are Matt. 20:17-28 and Luke 18:31-34. At the time of this text Jesus likely was in Perea, and the final week of suffering and death was at hand. Jesus intended to lead His disciples to Jerusalem, where there were many dangers for Him. The Jews always went *up* to Jerusalem no matter from which place they started. They also included the thought of a higher spiritual plane when they journeyed up to Jerusalem. The text gives an accurate announcement by Jesus about His betrayal, trials, suffering, death, and His glorious resurrection on the third day.

Matthew tells us that the mother of James and John was present and made the request for her sons. The earthly kingdom was still in their mind, and they were blind to the full meaning of His death and resurrection. In royalty both sides are places of honor. The right and left hand are mentioned with Solomon (1 Kings 2:19), Micaiah (1 Kings 22:19), Ezra (Neh. 8:4), and in Zech. 4:3.

It is not known whether the sons were disappointed at the answer which Jesus gave them about the cup and the baptism of suffering and His refusal to grant their request. To those who became indignant over this request of James and John or their mother, Jesus pointed out that real height in the kingdom of God means to render the greatest service. He who is great must minister to others. The greatest example of this is Christ, who in His greatness came to be the Servant of all and to give His life a ransom for many.

The text shows the path of suffering for Christ and His service to man through His death and resurrection.

The Day and Its Theme.—In 1 Cor. 13:1-13, the Epistle for the Day, the theme of love is clearly indicated. This is the great chapter on love. The Gospel, Luke 18:31-43, is our text in a parallel passage

with the added account of blind Bartimaeus. This story gives us a historical touch with the actual beginning of Lent. Ash Wednesday follows in three days, and Jesus is on the way to Jerusalem because of His great love for man and His ministry for our sins. At the beginning of Lent we pray Jesus to open our eyes in love (Bartimaeus) so that we may see Him and then serve Him in love. The Introit shows the cry of the church, pleading God to show a gracious disposition. This cry for salvation is in the soul of the worshiper as he begins the journey to the Cross and the Resurrection. (Strodach, *The Church Year*.) The Introit (Ps. 31:2b, 3), Collect, and Gradual (Ps. 77:14, 15, and Ps. 100:1-3) show that once we have been delivered in love we belong to Jesus and ought to serve Him.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon.—Christ has redeemed us through His suffering, death, and resurrection. We are now His people and must serve Him with love, humility, and gladness. We are also to serve our fellow men.

Sin to be Remedied.—The text points out the sin of pride. There are people who want a high position for the sake of honor without seeing the responsibility of service that goes with such a position. The text shows the sin of envy and covetousness of those who have higher stations in life. We are not to gossip or to speak evil of them. But instead of rejoicing at the good fortune of others, we slander them. The text shows the selfish heart of man in that he wants a life of ease for himself, and a great name, etc.

Opportunities for the Gospel.—For all these sins and, indeed, for all other sins also, Christ went up to Jerusalem and gave Himself as a ransom. God is truly Love (Epistle and Gospel). The Gradual shows the redemption. The kingdom of Jesus is spiritual and is not of this world.

Illustrations.—Show the stage setting for the dramatic announcement: Behold, we go up to Jerusalem. The scene with James and John is good. To show how Christ ministered with love can be done with the Bartimaeus section of the Gospel. Show the service of the disciples to Christ after His resurrection, though they were all put to death except John. Show the service of love which great missionaries performed or the sacrifices which great leaders in our church made for the sake of the Savior.

Outline

Let us humbly serve Christ, who foretold the path of His suffering, death, and resurrection for us.

- I. Christ foretold the path of His suffering, death, and resurrection.
 - A. Circumstances surrounding the announcement to the disciples.
 - B. Details of the path. Complete fulfillment of all of them.
 - C. The request of James and John indicates that this announcement was not fully understood.
- II. We serve this Christ in humility.
 - A. Why do we serve? We belong to Christ, and He lives in us. We are His people.
 - B. What kind of service? And where do we serve? The sphere of our activity is endless. Stress the *Parish Activities* theme here, which is "New Conquests for Christ in the Homeland."
 - C. What is the final purpose for serving Jesus? That all might be ransomed and saved for eternity.

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JOHN E. MEYER

INVOCAVIT

MATTHEW 16:21-23 (MARK 8:31-33)

The Text and Its Central Thought.—"From that time forth," ἀπὸ τότε, what time? From the time of Peter's great confession in the preceding verses, which was to Christ the indication that the time had come that He could proceed to the next step. Peter has just been given the right to forgive sin, and now follows the explanation of how Christ was going to make it possible for him to be able to give the absolution. The central thought is the revelation by Christ of what God has determined will happen—and coupled with this is the objection of man to this plan, as represented by Peter. It is the determination and dedication of the God-Man to do all for man, and the opposition of one man to undo all that God wants to do for man. It is not given in detail, yet the main points are tabulated in bold strokes. Δεῖ, it is necessary, this is what will happen. Not just to suffer, but to suffer πολλά, many things. The three constituent parts of the Sanhedrin, elders, chief priests, and scribes, would do what they wanted to do, but not without His knowing it beforehand. What the Emmaus disciples needed in reverse, the disciples now needed in advance. The sins of the Sanhedrin and of all the world would carry it out, with the permission of the Father, the Sender, and Christ the sacrifice, the One sent. That they would welcome the chance to do

away with Him, Peter knew; that Christ would voluntarily walk into it and even say δεῖ, Peter would not have. He could understand the Sanhedrin, they were human; the sort of Savior they wanted was the kind Peter wanted too. He understood their plans, but he did not understand God at all. The fervor and concern of a good friend are totally misdirected. The refusal of man to be saved and have his sins paid for is exemplified in Peter. The glory of success in a resurrection is entirely overruled and the whole plan declared unnecessary. The hand of the Christ who leads thus far, is now taken in hand to the side: "Then Peter took Him." Ἠρξάτο, he, Peter, began, the same word as in v. 21, when Christ began. Not long before he submitted to the Son of God, to whom he listened and from whom he accepted instruction, One with whom he agreed and whom he should not contradict. However, as soon as Christ begins to show the real meaning of what there is for Him to do, so soon does Peter begin to cross Him. "Ἰλεῶς σοι, "God be merciful to you!" Where Peter thought Christ should quit, there is where Christ would have to begin if there would be any keys of the Kingdom for the Apostle to use. Lent is the hammer that pounds out the key. V. 19 suggests the picture; v. 21 supplies the main ridges. The Lord would be unmerciful to Himself, that He might be merciful to us. But Peter says, "I'm going to see to it that this will not be."

"I'm going to see to it that it will be," says Christ. Interference will not be tolerated! It was a rebuke, not merely to follow behind, but to get out of His sight, out of the church. "Get thee behind Me, Satan!" Where Peter thought he was stepping in, he was stepping out, and Christ shows him the door to hell. "Thou art a σκάνδαλον to Me," a death trap. You suggest the delectable bait attached to the deadly trap: get out of My way! Because you do not have the same mind, do not agree with the things of God, "but those that be of men." You think you are a perfect disciple. You see only what most other men see: an innocent man going to the gallows, foolishly.

The Day and Its Theme.—The First Sunday in Lent, Invocavit, takes its name from the Introit, Ps. 9:15. The general theme, "Temptation," is suggested by the Standard Lesson in Matt. 4:1-11, the temptation of Christ by the devil. Ὑπαγε, Σατανᾶ are the identical words of Matt. 4:10 and of our text. The strongest features of the rebuke spoken by Christ to Satan are applied directly to the most prominent disciple. The specific temptation at the beginning of another Lenten season is the one suggested in the theme of the outline below: *Saving the Savior, or, Canceling the Lenten Season.*

At any rate, the text bristles with two violent and contradictory negatives. The Lenten season begins with a vehement objection and a corresponding rebuke.

The Goal and Purpose of the Sermon. — To open the Lenten season, Christ going before, while we follow every step and all the way. He takes us aside (and that is what Lent is) for two reasons: to instruct and to rebuke. Not that we merely see through Peter, but see through ourselves what Christ saw in Peter. That we do not hesitate to hear the rebukes: (1) in our own mouths, as Peter to Christ, and (2) in the mouth of Christ to Peter, as to us.

Sins Diagnosed and Remedied. — Against the background of a solid and unequivocal confession, a disgusting reversal. Peter wanted a Savior, but he did not want to be saved the Savior's way. An incongruous, impetuous, and sinful piece of self-assertion to the Savior of the world. The man in the burning house presumes to direct the rescue operation outside. A complete lack of understanding of what sin is. That is a sin in itself. It deserves the rebuke to Peter. Terms: Satan, *skandalon*, human.

Opportunities for Gospel: Salvation is entirely and completely the work of God. The most fervent objection of a Peter is set down with a firm rebuke. Any attempt on your part to interfere or ever suggest an alternative is to unsweeten the Gospel. Lent is the exclusive activity of God on man's behalf, v. 23, τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ. He who is saved need only observe, recount, ponder, accept and see Christ save him. "He began to show . . ." in detail what He would do then: He continues to show in detail what He has done, again in the course of the impending season.

Illustrations: Peter's objection assumes the force of a benevolent kick in the stomach — an extreme and heroic stroke of trigger action, calculated to save the sincere but foolish intentions of a bosom friend — effecting a temporary convulsion, hoping that the doubling up will give the friend time for more sober reflection and so save him from total disaster. A body blow to the heart of God. Peter was lowering Him from the cross too soon. Our task: to feel the pulse of sin on the wrist of a dead Christ.

Outline

Saving the Savior, or, Canceling the Lenten Season.

Invitation to Peter

- I. How the Savior wants to save — God's plan, v. 21 — the proposition.

Invitation refused

II. How Peter wants to save — man's plan, v. 22 — the objection.

- A. He wants to save the Savior.
- B. He wants to save himself.
- C. No plan at all, only a big NO.

Invitation accepted

III. How the Savior saves — the objection overruled.

- A. By the rebuke, v. 23.
- B. By Peter going along, though limping. Much denial on the way.

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